DC

WILDC.A.T.S®

COVERT ACTION TEAMS

13
SEP

NAME'S VOODOO.

GOOD GAL GONE BAD.

NOT QUITE HER FAULT. SHE'S SORT OF AN **EXORCIST.** TROUBLE IS, OCCASIONALLY SHE GETS **POSSESSED** IN RETURN. HAPPENED TONIGHT WITH A CRITTER CALLED A **RAKSHA.**

BY PROFESSION, THEY KILL PEOPLE. BY NATURE, THEY LIVE BY STEALING THE LIFE FORCES OF OTHERS.

BAD NEWS FOR THESE **FRIENDS** OF HERS.

PRIS?!

WHAT ARE YOU **DOING?!**

MY GOD -- SHE'S ATTACKING LIKE SOME **RABID ANIMAL!**

JULES, **GET DOWN!**

YOU'RE BLOCKING MY **SHOT!**

FOOLS!

JACOB MARLOWE'S LURED YOU INTO A **TRAP!**

HE MEANS FOR ME TO **KILL** YOU!

THAT'S **IMPOSSIBLE!**

JACOB **FOUNDED** THE **WILDC.A.T.S!**

JACOB ISN'T HIS OWN MAN ANYMORE, JULES.

NONE OF THE WILDC.A.T.S ARE --

-- EXCEPT MAYBE ***ZEALOT.***

THEY -- ***WE*** -- HAVE ALL BEEN TAKEN OVER...

...BY SOME MIND-WITCH NAMED ***TAPESTRY.***

WHERE'S THAT LEAVE ***YOU,*** SWEETIE?

BETTER OFF ***DEAD.***

NO!

DON'T YOU SAY THAT, VOODOO, DON'T YOU DARE!

JULES, I'M HANGING ONTO CONTROL BY MY FINGER-TIPS.

I DON'T WANT TO DIE...

...BUT I WON'T LET THE RAKSHA ***KILL*** AGAIN.

CAN'T YOUR POWER ***PURGE*** THIS CREATURE FROM YOU?

I TRIED. I DON'T HAVE THE ***STRENGTH.***

ONLY WAY TO GET THAT STRENGTH IS TO ***TAKE*** IT FROM SOMEONE ELSE.

THEN ***THAT'S*** WHAT WE'LL DO.

ARE YOU ***NUTS?!***

STANSFIELD AND I MAY NOT BE WILDC.A.T.S LIKE YOU, VOODOO...

...BUT WE'RE STILL A PART OF THE ***TEAM!***

JULES, DON'T!

I CAN FEEL THE RAKSHA'S ***HUNGER!***

ONCE I START TO ***FEED,*** I DON'T KNOW IF I CAN KEEP FROM TAKING ***ALL*** OF YOUR LIFE FORCE!

I ***TRUST*** YOU, PRIS.

THIS IS ***CRAZY.***

YOU'RE ***BOTH*** CRAZY.

BUT ***I*** TRUST YOU, TOO.

SPEAKIN' OF TAPESTRY'S MIND-CONTROLLED 'C.A.T.S --

WOULDN'T MIND AN *EXPLANATION*, HUNTSMAN!

IT'S REALLY QUITE SIMPLE, *GRIFTER.*

THE *RAKSHAS* WORK FOR *TAPESTRY.*

AND NOW, EVIDENTLY, SO DO YOUR FELLOW WILDC.A.T.S.

THERE'S HISTORY BETWEEN TAPESTRY AND *ZEALOT.* SERIOUS BAD BLOOD.

KRAK

WHAK

PHAM

SO WHAT ELSE IS NEW?

WHAT'S SHE WANT, ANYWAY? ASIDE FROM OUR HEADS.

ALABASTER WU, FOR A START, AND THROUGH HIM, THE PEOPLE HE'S TRYING TO SAVE.

PHAM

PHAM

BEYOND THAT, I HAVEN'T A CLUE.

I'M *NEW* TO THIS PLACE.

WHAT MAKES THIS YOUR FIGHT, THEN?

I OWE ZEALOT A *DEBT.*

ONE WAY OR ANOTHER, PAL, DON'T WE *ALL.*

I CAN TELL YOU TAPESTRY *SCARES* ZEALOT...

SZZAAK

GIMME A *BREAK*, PAL! *NOTHIN'* FAZES THAT WOMAN --

HEY!

INCOMING!

A LITTLE *TOO* DAMN CLOSE FOR COMFORT, THAT WAS.

WHY DO YOU THINK ZEALOT CALLED IN THESE REINFORCEMENTS -- *SAVANT* AND *SOLDIER* AND *MISTER MAJESTIC?*

HEARD OF MAJESTIC. ZEALOT HATES HIS GUTS.

AIN'T FOND OF HER SISTER, SAVANT, EITHER.

TO ASK THEM FOR HELP...

...SHE'D HAVE TO BE *DESPERATE.*

PHAM

PHAM

PHAM

MY POINT EXACTLY.

GRIFTER'S BEING GENEROUS...

...USING NON-LETHAL "PUNCH-OUT" ROUNDS TO INCAPACITATE HIS TARGETS INSTEAD OF KILL THEM.

THEY WON'T BE ENOUGH.

TAPESTRY IS THE KEY.

ZEALOT, *NO!*

PLEASE, *LISTEN* TO ME! REMEMBER THE LAST TIME!

YOU DON'T *DARE* CONFRONT--

YOU GO PUNCH FOR PUNCH WITH *MAUL*, LITTLE MAN...

...YOU *LOSE!*

WHAM

-WUNGH!

SAVANT!

HATE THIS...

...CAUGHT IN THE MIDDLE, NO WAY TO FIGHT FOR MYSELF.

AIN'T EVEN GOT MY OWN CLOTHES ANYMORE.

ZEALOT ZAPPED 'EM, TURNED 'EM INTO THIS DUMB **ARMOR.**

NOW I GOT HER VOICE IN MY HEAD...

...TELLIN' ME TO TAKE THIS WACKADOO CRYSTAL FROM SAVANT'S SATCH.

DOESN'T EVEN CARE IF HER SIS IS STILL **BREATHIN'!**

I ***DO*** CARE, MIRANDA.

AND SHE IS.

BUT MORE IS AT STAKE HERE THAN HER LIFE, OR YOURS, OR ***ALL*** OF OURS COMBINED.

IF I MUST, I WILL ***SACRIFICE*** THEM ALL.

I NEED YOUR HELP.

CAN I SAY NO?

FORGIVE ME...

YMPFF

IS THERE NO ***END*** TO THIS?

THE HARDER I HIT MAUL...

KRAK

UNNGH!

...THE ***LARGER*** HE GROWS!

THAT'S HIS *POWER* -- HE *GROWS.*

THE BIGGER HE GETS, THE *STRONGER* HE GETS.

THE STRONGER, HE GETS, THE *DUMBER!*

YOU SHOULD TALK, GRIFTER.

FORGETTING ALL THE RULES YOU CLAIM TO LIVE BY.

WHAT'S THE MATTER, LOSING YOUR *EDGE?*

AAARGH!

SLAAAAAASH

BAD MISTAKE WHEN *WARBLADE'S* AROUND...

...'CAUSE I'M NOTHING *BUT* EDGES.

SHAKT

SHAKT

AN' EVERY ONE OF THEM IS *HUNGRY* FOR YOUR *BLOOD!*

WHATTA *REVOLTIN'* DEVELOPMENT.

WHAT'S SHAKIN', BABY SISTER?

WHAT ISN'T, SOLDIER?

HOW'RE WE DOING?

ZEALOT SKIPPED WITH THE LITTLE GIRL.

WARBLADE'S PRESSIN' GRIFTER HARD.

GRIFTER!

IN *DEFIANCE* OF TRADITION -- AND OF COMMON SENSE --

-- ZEALOT TRAINED YOU AS ONE OF THE *CODA!*

THE *ONLY* MAN IN HISTORY TO BE SO HONORED.

HERE'S YOUR CHANCE TO PROVE YOURSELF *WORTHY* OF HER TRUST!

HAD I FOLLOWED MY SISTER'S PATH, THESE BLADES WOULD HAVE BEEN MINE. BEST NOW, THEY GO TO *YOU!*

I'M *OBLIGED*, SAVVIE.

YOU WANT ME, BLADE...

... HERE I AM.

TAKE YOUR BEST SHOT.

MAN HAS *STYLE*, CREDIT HIM FOR THAT.

TIME TO *RABBIT*, BABY SISTER.

CHOOM

BRRRRRP

CHOOM

MY TWELVE-GAUGE REMINGTON'S NO MATCH FOR THAT WU FELLA'S *AUTOFIRE!*

SOLDIER, WAIT -- MY *BAG!*

DAMNATION, CHILD, IT'S *ZEALOT* FOLKS SAY DON'T KNOW HOW TO DIE.

YOU AIN'T LEARNED THAT TRICK YET.

CHOOM

THERE ARE FATES *WORSE* THAN DEATH, SOLDIER.

AND DON'T CALL ME "*CHILD*." I'M *OLDER* THAN I LOOK.

SOMETHING'S *MISSING* FROM MY BAG!

YOU SURE?

WAY I FIGURE, YOU GOT MORE TRASH IN YOUR LITTLE SACK THAN THE *SMITHSONIAN* IN ITS WHOLE COLLECTION!

IT'S *MY* BAG. I KNOW *EVERYTHING* THAT'S IN IT.

THAT LITTLE BLOND KID, MIRANDA -- ZEALOT HAD HER TAKE SOMETHING.

PIECE 'O CRYSTAL, SIZE 'O YOUR HAND.

NO!

MERCIFUL HECATE, *NO!*

HEY, ZEALOT KNOWS WHAT SHE'S DOING, ALWAYS DOES. TRUST HER, KIDDO.

YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND! *NONE* OF YOU UNDERSTAND!

I'VE SEEN TAPESTRY WORK. I'VE FELT HER POWER! SHE SPENT A *HUNDRED YEARS* TRYING TO REMAKE ZEALOT IN HER OWN IMAGE AND DAMN NEAR *SUCCEEDED!*

"YOU EXPECT ZEALOT TO FIGHT HER? BY ALL THAT'S HOLY, SHE ***WORSHIPS*** HER!"

ARE THEY NOT ***BEAUTIFUL***, SOMA?

MY TWIN ***SEERS*** -- ***PROVIDENCE*** AND ***VOID*** -- CHILDREN OF THE ***ORB.***

AS THEIR BODIES COALESCE, SO TOO DO THEIR ***MINDS*** AND ***SOULS.***

EVENTUALLY, AS INDIVIDUALS, THEY WILL ***CEASE*** TO BE. ALL THAT WILL REMAIN IS ***POWER.***

THAT *I* WILL WIELD.

A ***GLORIOUS*** MOMENT, DOMINA. ONE WHICH I AM ***EAGER*** TO BEHOLD.

BUT I MUST INFORM YOU THAT THE BATTLE DOES NOT GO WELL FOR US.

NO MATTER. THE WILDC.A.T.S ARE BUT PAWNS. THEIR FATE IS UNIMPORTANT...

... SO LONG AS, IN THE END, ***ZEALOT*** IS ONCE MORE ***MINE!***

DOMINA -- ***WHY?!***

NEARLY THE WHOLE OF ***HUMAN HISTORY*** HAS PASSED SINCE YOUR PATHS LAST CROSSED. WHY ***NOW?***

THIS IS ***MY*** WORLD, SOMA.

BOTH ***DAEMONITE*** AND ***KHERUBIM*** ARE STRANGERS HERE.

THEY HAVE HUNTED AND KILLED -- AND NOW WOULD ***CONQUER*** -- PREY THAT IS RIGHTFULLY ***MINE!***

THAT, I ***WILL NOT*** ALLOW!

I AM THE ***PLAGUE*** THAT WILL CONSUME ***BOTH*** THEIR ACCURSED HOUSES!

I SAY ***NOT!***

WEAVER OF FATES...

...YOU HAVE WOVEN YOUR *FINAL* TAPESTRY.

THE *PRODIGAL* RETURNS.

IT TOOK A MIRACLE TO SAVE YOU LAST TIME.

TONIGHT, I SHAN'T BE SO MERCIFUL.

WHAT MAKES YOU THINK...

...THAT DECISION WILL BE *YOURS?*

IT'S LIKE THEY'RE SPINNING THREAD FROM THEIR SOULS...

...EACH CRAFTING A PATTERN TO ENSNARE THE OTHER.

AND WHEN THAT ISN'T ENOUGH TO DO THE JOB...

...THEY TAKE WHAT THEY NEED FROM THE SEERS.

GLORY!

IT'S *WORSE* THAN BEFORE.

ONE MAKES THE OTHER A CHILD...

...AND SHE IN TURN BECOMES A CRONE.

TAPESTRY. HAS THE KNOWLEDGE OF AGES, AND THE SKILL...

...BUT ZEALOT MATCHES HER PERFECTLY WITH HER OWN INDOMITABLE WILL.

ONE'S PASSION OFFSETS THE OTHER'S. THEY'RE A PERFECT *BALANCE!*

IN THE PROCESS, THEY'RE *DESTROYING* PROVIDENCE AND VOID. TAPESTRY DOESN'T CARE -- IT'S WHAT SHE WANTED ANYWAY -- AND ZEALOT CAN'T AFFORD TO.

BUT SHE'S TOO GOOD A *STRATEGIST...*

...SHE HAD TO HAVE KNOWN THE DUEL WOULD QUICKLY BECOME A *STALEMATE.*

OF COURSE. THAT'S WHY SHE BROUGHT ***MIRANDA*** AND HAD HER TAKE THE ***ORB SHARD*** I'D FOUND AGES AGO.

IT'S ***IMPRINTED*** WITH ZEALOT'S AURA. THRUST IT INTO THE HEART OF THE MATRIX SHE AND TAPESTRY ARE FORMING, IT'LL SHIFT THE BALANCE OF POWER TO ***HER!***

BRIGHT, BLOODY GODDESS -- THEY'VE BOTH CAST ASIDE ALL SEMBLANCE OF HUMANITY!

ZEALOT MANIFESTS HERSELF AS A DAEMONITE, AND TAPESTRY -- THAT MUST BE A RAKSHA!

MIRANDA CAN'T APPROACH THEM...

... THEY'LL WARP HER FLESH MORE EASILY THAN THEY DO THEIR OWN!

NOT SO FAST, MY LITTLE ONE!

THE SEERS ***WARNED*** US OF SUCH A STRATEGEM.

CLOSE YOUR EYES, NOW. BID THIS VALE OF TEARS A FINAL FAREWELL...

...AS ***SOMA*** TAKES FROM YOU, FIRST YOUR SENSES...

...AND ***LASTLY***, YOUR ***LIFE!***

NOW WHAT?

C'MON, CORDELIA. THINK LIKE A CODA, THINK LIKE THE ***MAJESTRIX.*** ZEALOT HAS A ***REASON*** FOR EVERYTHING. EVEN IF I GET PAST SOMA, I'M JUST AS VULNERABLE TO THE MATRIX. WHAT MADE MIRANDA SO ***SPECIAL?***

MY ***WORLD-WALKING WINDOW...***

HUNTSMAN.

HE HAS TO BE THE KEY. THERE'S ***NOTHING*** ELSE.

"...CAN FIND HIM..."

WHAKT

SPARTAN'S AN ANDROID.

"...AND BRING HIM TO ME."

PHYSICAL BLOWS DON'T AFFECT HIM AS THEY WOULD A LIVING BEING!

I'LL HAVE TO--

!?!

SIZZAAK

?!?

HUNTSMAN --

-- MIRANDA NEEDS YOUR ***PROTECTION!*** AND WE BOTH NEED YOUR ***HELP!***

SO -- MORE LAMBS TO THE ***SLAUGHTER!***

LAMBS? NOT HARDLY.

SWISH

AND SLAUGHTER?

EVEN LESS!

WHAM

NICE MOVES!

PROBLEM IS, YOU'LL NEED ***BETTER*** TO REALLY SAVE THE DAY!

MIRANDA?

ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?

ZEH - ZEHL - ZEALOT

SHE CAN TAKE CARE OF HERSELF, LITTLE PRINCESS. WE'RE ***OUT*** OF HERE.

JUST LIKE THAT, WITH ALL THAT'S AT STAKE?!

IT ISN'T OUR FIGHT.

ZEALOT CALLED YOU HER ***FRIEND.*** SHE DOESN'T HAVE MANY.

SETS HER STANDARDS TOO DAMN HIGH. BUT IF THE WORD MEANS ***ANY-THING...***

I WON'T LEAVE HER.

FINE. SO WHAT DO WE DO?

...THE ***MACEDONIAN*** SOLUTION.

A PHRASE SHE LEFT IN MY HEAD, HUNTSMAN...

LONG TIME AGO, SO SAVANT SAYS...

...AND SHE SHOULD KNOW, 'CAUSE SHE AND ZEALOT WERE THERE...

...GUY NAMED **ALEXANDER** WAS PRESENTED WITH THIS **KNOT** FOLKS SAID COULDN'T BE UNTIED.

CHALLENGED HIM TO TAKE A SHOT.

ALEX, HE GRABBED A SWORD AND **CUT** THE PUPPY IN HALF.

SO HUNT, HE TAKES SAVANT'S **CRYSTAL**...

...SHE SAYS IT'S TAPPED INTO THE SAME FORCE THAT EMPOWERS THE TWO SEERS...

...AND PREPS IT TO DO THE SAME.

GAMBLE IS, SINCE ZEALOT HOPEFULLY KNOWS WHAT'S COMIN', WHEN WE CUT THE CORD THAT BINDS 'EM, SHE'LL BE ABLE TO RIDE OUT THE **SHOCK** AN' GRAB CONTROL OF THE POWER FOR **HERSELF.**

SAVANT'S **FEAR** IS, WE'LL BE SWITCHIN' ONE DEVIL FOR **ANOTHER.**

I GOT MORE **FAITH.**

SHE FIGURES I DON'T KNOW ANY BETTER.

WHILE WE WATCH, ZEALOT AN' TAPESTRY'S DUEL STARTS STRIKING RESONANCES IN EVERYTHING AROUND THEM. SAVANT AN' I, WE BOTH TURN **WEIRD.**

ONLY HUNTSMAN STAYS THE SAME.

EXCEPT FOR THE CRYSTAL.

IN HIS HAND IT BECOMES A CODA **CLEF BLADE.**

AN' HE DOESN'T WASTE A SECOND IN **USING** IT.

THAT'S WHEN THE WORLD EXPLODES.
FOR US...

...FOR EVERYBODY.

WHAKOOM

STILL DARK WHEN I CREASE MY PEEPS FOR A LOOKSEE.

PROBABLY FOR THE BEST.

SEEN ***WAR ZONES*** IN BETTER SHAPE.

HUNT'S OKAY.

AND I GUESS I AM, TOO.

UNFORTUNATELY, WE'RE NOT THE ***ONLY*** ONES...

FOR WHAT YOU HAVE DONE, STRANGER...

...I WILL ***KILL*** YOU!

THIS I SWEAR --

-- I WILL KILL YOU ALL!

WASTE OF BREATH, SOMA.

WASTE OF EFFORT.

YOU'RE DONE, AND SO IS YOUR DOMINA.

GIVE IT UP WHILE YOU HAVE THE CHANCE.

TAPESTRY IS RARELY BEATEN, WARRIOR.

AND SHE NEVER SURRENDERS.

SAVANT'S PYRAMID!

IT TRANSPORTED HUNTSMAN INTO OUR MIDST.I WILL MAKE IT STEAL US AWAY!

MY MISTRESS WILL WEAVE ANOTHER PATTERN, FOOLS!

BEFORE SHE IS DONE, YOU WILL HOWL FOR THE MERCY OF A QUICK AND FINAL DEATH!

SAVANT, IS THERE A WAY TO FOLLOW--

WHAT THE DEVIL ARE YOU DOING?!

I AM NOT A CODA, BUT I AM A BLOODBORN SISTER TO THE MAJESTRIX OF THAT ORDER.

IF ANY HAS THE RIGHT TO CALL THE HOURS OF HER LIFE, IT IS I.

IF I MUST END YOURS IN THE BARGAIN, HUNTSMAN, THEN WITH REGRET...

...SO BE IT.

ARE YOU *MAD?*

IT MAY SEEM SO, HUNTSMAN, BUT WE ARE NOT.

THE POWER ZEALOT WIELDS IS TOO DANGEROUS, THE ABILITIES LEARNED FROM TAPESTRY TOO *CORRUPTING.* SHE CANNOT POSSESS THEM AND LIVE.

AS A FULL-BLOOD *LORD* OF THE KHERUBIM, IT IS MY DUTY TO BOTH PASS SENTENCE AND *EXECUTE* IT.

WHO THE HELL WENT AND MADE *YOU* GOD, MAJESTIC?

I AM WHAT I AM, SOLDIER. I DO WHAT I MUST.

YOU *CAN'T!*

IT IS FOR THE *BEST,* MIRANDA.

ARE YOU SO AFRAID?

INCLUDING GIVE IT UP.

I DID THAT ONCE BEFORE, HUNTSMAN.

I DON'T KNOW IF I HAVE THE STRENGTH TO TRY AGAIN.

MAYBE YOU NEED A LITTLE *HELP* FROM YOUR FRIENDS.

I'VE LISTENED TO YOUR DREAMS, ZEALOT. HELD YOU CLOSE AFTER SOME OF THEM. HUNTSMAN AND THE KID ARE *RIGHT.*

YOU *JUDGE* ME, COLE?

COMES WITH THE TERRITORY. I'M YOUR *FRIEND.*

THEY HAVE GOOD REASON.

DEAR FRIENDS, YOU HAVE NEVER KNOWN SUCH POWER. WITH IT, I AM *GOD* MADE FLESH. I CAN DO *ANYTHING!*

TIME TO *CHOOSE,* ZEALOT -- TO BE MISTRESS OF YOUR OWN FATE, OR ANOTHER *VICTIM.*

YOU CAST MY OWN WORDS INTO MY FACE, PRISCILLA?

I *BEAT* MY DEMON. SO CAN *YOU.*

"THE WEAPON IS THE EXTENSION OF THE FLESH, THE FLESH OF THE MIND, THE MIND OF THE SOUL." THAT'S WHAT YOU TOLD ME, REMEMBER?

FIRST RULE OF THE CODA.

POWER IS A WEAPON. YOU USE IT, OR LAY IT ASIDE, AS NEEDED. OR, IN THIS CASE...

...ALLOW IT TO BE PURGED.

MY FATE, SISTER, IS IN YOUR HANDS.

ACCORDING TO GRIFTER...

...VOODOO'S A GIFTED ONE -- PART HUMAN, PART KHERUBIM -- SPECIAL HERITAGE, UNIQUE TALENTS.

ONLY THIS TIME, SHE ISN'T EXORCISING SOME PSYCHO-CRITTER, LIKE THE RAKSHA THAT POSSESSED HER.

SHE'S CARVING AWAY SLICES OF ZEALOT'S SOUL.

VOODOO OFFERS THE SKILL, THE KNOWLEDGE OF WHAT TO DO. MAJESTIC, THE STRENGTH TO SUSTAIN THE PROCESS.

BUT ZEALOT PROVIDES THE WILL, THE FOCUS, THE DESIRE.

KINDA LIKE POKING OUT YOUR OWN EYES.

THE POWER PULSES FROM HER IN WAVES...

...SWEEPING OVER US ALL...

...WASHING AWAY EVERY VESTIGE OF TAPESTRY'S TWISTED DESIGN...

...MAKING EVERYBODY WHOLE ONCE MORE.

BUT EACH WAVE IS WEAKER THAN THE ONE BEFORE.

THE LIGHT FROM HER SOUL DOESN'T SPARKLE QUITE SO BRIGHT.

THROUGH IT ALL, SAVANT'S A ROCK. NEVER MOVES, NEVER WAVERS, STANDS WITH SWORD AND CLEF BLADE POISED. ANYTHING GOES WRONG, SHE'S HER SISTER'S DEATH.

SHE WON'T CRY.

NEITHER WILL WE.

'S OKAY, THOUGH. VOODOO WEEPS FOR US ALL.

IT IS DONE.

I AM MYSELF.

I'LL GRANT YOU THIS, JACOB...

...YOU NEVER FAIL TO SHOW A GUEST AN INTERESTING TIME.

AS I RECALL, WU, FOR YOUR FOLKS, "MAY YOU LIVE IN INTERESTING TIMES" IS A CURSE.

YOU STILL SET ON CALLING IN YOUR MARKER?

WE HAVE REACHED THE END OF THE LINE, JACOB.

TAPESTRY NOTWITHSTANDING, WE HAVE NOWHERE ELSE TO RUN..

THIS DOCKYARD AIN'T EXACTLY THE PROMISED LAND, M'FRIEND.

IT WILL SERVE. IT HAS TO.

YOU WANT THE DOCKYARD, WU -- IT'S YOURS.

BY THE BY, HOW MANY PEOPLE WE TALKIN' ABOUT BRINGIN' IN HERE?

AS MANY AS I CAN SAVE.

IF THE GODS ARE KIND...

...A MILLION.

DID WE DO THE RIGHT THING?

PART OF ME STILL BELIEVES I SHOULD HAVE *KILLED* HER WHEN THIS ALL BEGAN.

FAR AS *I'M* CONCERNED, BABY SISTER, YA DONE *GOOD.*

PERHAPS, THE VICTORY IS NOT IN THE ENDING OF THE BATTLE, BUT THE *STRUGGLE* ITSELF.

TWICE, *POWER ABSOLUTE* WAS PLACED WITHIN HER GRASP. AND TWICE...

...SHE LET IT *FALL.*

I THINK, AFTER ALL, SAVANT, THAT HUNTSMAN SPOKE TRULY.

IT IS *ZEALOT,* AND ZEALOT *ALONE,* WHO HAS EARNED FULL DOMINION OVER THE SPAN OF HER LIFE.

THANK YOU, HUNTSMAN, FOR STANDING BY ME.

NO LESS THAN YOU'D DO IN RETURN.

AT THE END, WHEN YOU'D GRABBED ALL THE POWER...

...HOW BADLY DID YOU WANT TO KEEP IT?

MORE THAN MY LIFE.

BUT NOT, THANK HECATE, MORE THAN MY SOUL.

I'M SORRY TAPESTRY GOT AWAY.

IT'S NOT YOUR FIGHT TO END.

AND IF IT ENDS WITH HER DEATH...

...I WILL *MOURN* THAT SISTER OF MY SPIRIT -- EVIL THOUGH SHE IS -- AS I WOULD THE SISTER OF MY FLESH.

THEN, AS NOW, Z, MY PLEDGE STILL STANDS.

THEN, AS NOW, HUNTSMAN...

...I WILL *HOLD* YOU TO IT.

IN THE MEANWHILE, WHERE WILL YOU GO -- WHAT WILL YOU DO?

MIRANDA'S CALL, BOTH WAYS.

WHO IS SHE TO YOU, MY FRIEND?

I'M HER *PROTECTOR.*

BUT WHO IS *SHE?*

I'LL BE IN TOUCH.

SOME GUYS ARE JUST TOO DAMN *SMOOTH...*

...TO BE ALLOWED TO LIVE.

THEN IT'S PROBABLY FOR THE BEST THAT HE ISN'T STAYING.

TOO BAD.

YOU DID VERY WELL TONIGHT, PRISCILLA. YOU ARE FAR STRONGER, AND POSSESS FAR MORE COURAGE THAN YOU GIVE YOURSELF CREDIT FOR.

WITHOUT YOU, ALL WOULD HAVE BEEN LOST.

WITHOUT *ME,* A LOT OF THIS WOULDN'T HAVE HAPPENED AT *ALL.*

"POWER WITHOUT PURPOSE," THE RASHKA TOLD ME.

I CAN'T FLY ON INSTINCT AND DUMB LUCK ANYMORE, ZEALOT. HE USED ME TO *KILL.* AND MADE ME *LOVE* IT.

I'LL *NEVER* ALLOW THAT TO HAPPEN AGAIN.

WHATEVER...

...WHATEVER YOU'RE WILLING TO TEACH ME...

...I'M PREPARED TO *LEARN.*

THEN, YOUNG *CODA* --

-- LET US *BEGIN.*

FIN

"The Price"

story
CHRIS CLAREMONT

pencils:
RICHARD JOHNSON

inks
KARL STORY

letters:
TOM ORZECHOWSKI

ONCE UPON A TIME...

SKRIK

ENTER FREELY, *ZEALOT*...

... AND OF YOUR OWN WILL.

YOU *KNOW* ME?

RENEGADE *MAJESTRIX* OF THE *CODA*.

ONCE MATRIARCH OF THAT FABLED CLAN OF *WARRIOR WOMEN*.

IT IS SAID YOU DO NOT KNOW HOW TO *DIE*.

ARE YOU *TAPESTRY*--

--THE ONE FOLK CALL THE *WEAVER OF SOULS*?

AND IF I AM *NOT*?

THEN ALL I ASK OF YOU IS A PLACE BY YOUR FIRE FOR MY *SISTER* AND I TO PASS THE NIGHT.

COME SUNRISE, WE WILL BE GONE.

COME SUNRISE, SWEET *SAVANT* WILL BE *DEAD*.

WHAT AILS HER?

SHE IS POISONED.

IT EATS HER FROM WITHIN, LIKE A CANCER. NO REMEDY I KNOW HAS BEEN ABLE TO STOP IT.

CAN YOU HELP?

WHY SHOULD I?

WHO ARE YOU TO ME THAT I SHOULD *CARE?*

I WILL MAKE IT WORTH YOUR WHILE.

I HAVE NO USE FOR GOLD OR PRETTY THINGS. NOR FOR SWORDS.

ALL I REQUIRE IN THE WORLD LIES WITHIN MY GRASP.

NAME YOUR *PRICE*, THEN!

SO *EASY* TO PROMISE, CODA.

SO EASY TO *RENEGE* WHEN THE WORK IS DONE.

MY *WORD*, CRONE, IS MY *BOND!*

I OFFER YOU MY *CLEF BLADE* AS SURETY.

IF I PROVE *FALSE*, USE IT TO TAKE MY *LIFE!*

DO YOU THINK, BECAUSE I AM *OLD*...

...I LACK BOTH WILL AND *SKILL*...

...TO DO PRECISELY *THAT*?!

WILL YOU SAVE MY SISTER?

THE QUESTION, MY DEAR...

...IS WHO WILL SAVE *YOU*?

FIRST I DRAW FORTH *BLOOD*...

...AND THEN, THE *SPIRIT*.

WHAT ARE YOU *DOING*?!

WE SPOKE OF *PRICE*.

I SEEK TO SHOW YOU WHAT THAT ENTAILS.

THAT IS NOT ME!!

FOR *ONE HUNDRED YEARS*, IT WILL BE.

WHAT I REQUIRE OF YOU, ZEALOT, IS *SERVICE.*

A SMALL SUM OF DAYS FROM YOU, IN RETURN FOR ALL THAT REMAIN OF YOUR SISTER'S.

I WILL NOT BETRAY MY OATHS AS A CODA.

NO CODICILS. *NO* QUALIFICATIONS.

ABSOLUTE LOYALTY, ABSOLUTE OBEDIENCE, IN ALL WAYS, IN ALL THINGS.

YOU ALREADY KNOW MY ANSWER.

YES

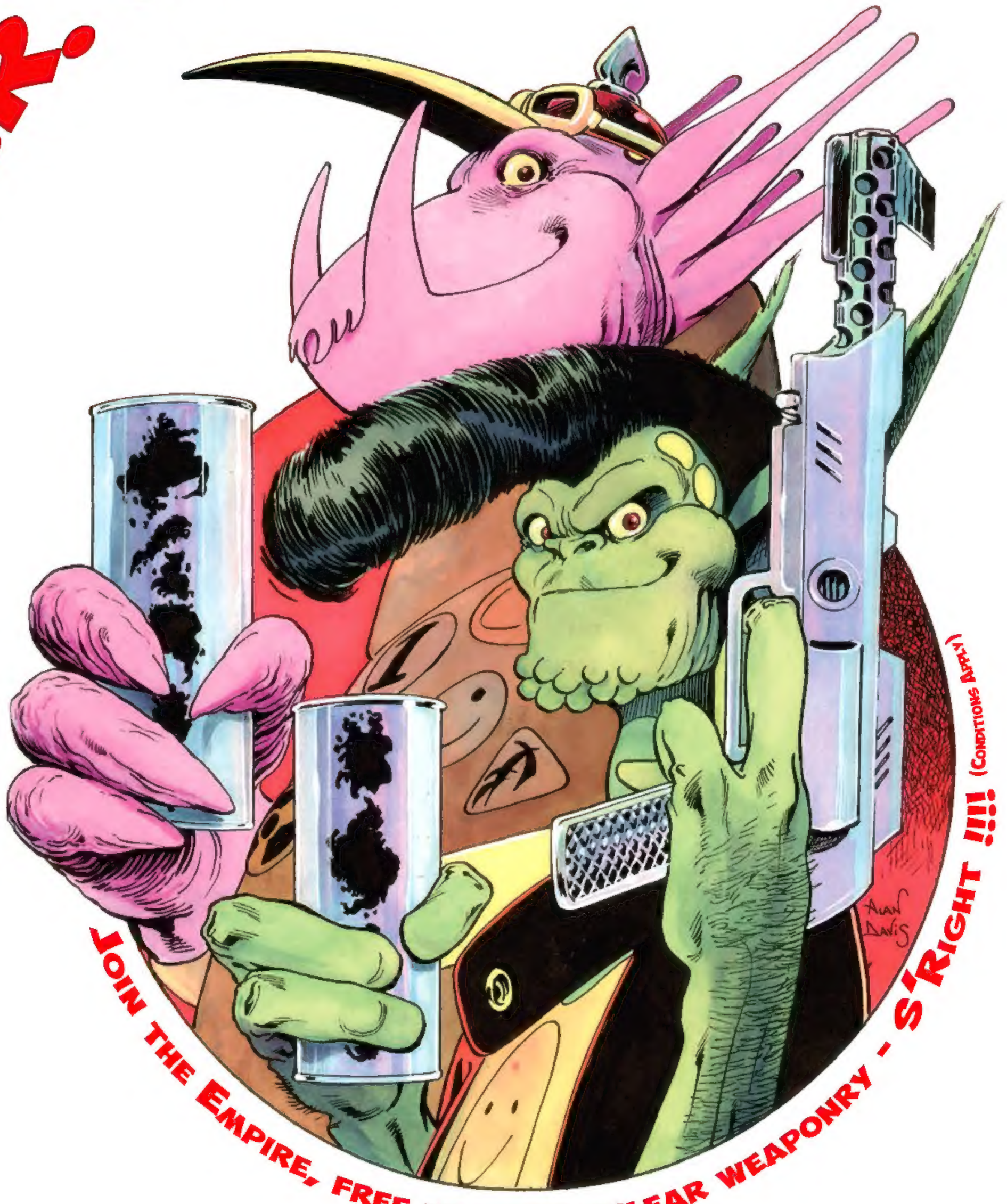
AND NOW *YOU* KNOW IT TOO.

IN *ALL* WAYS, TAPESTRY, IN ALL THINGS, FOR ONE HUNDRED YEARS...

...*I AM YOURS.*

FIN

D.R. & QUINCH



JOIN THE EMPIRE, FREE THERMONUCLEAR WEAPONRY - S'RIGHT !!!! (CONDITIONS APPLY)

K6 NW